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CONFIDENTIAL PTQ5235

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INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACO-00	CIAE-00	USNW-00	DINT-00	DODE-00
	DOTE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	EUR-00	FAAE-00	FBIE-00
	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00
	AC-01	NSAE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PC-01	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/008W	

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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0271
INFO NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 003398

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER
LONDON FOR CHARLES GURNEY
PARIS FOR CHARLES NEARY
NAIROBI FOR TERRY PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/11
TAGS: PGOV PINR ZI
SUBJECT: NEW ZIMBABWE SURVEY PORTENDS CLOSE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION

CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL OFFICER TODD FAULK FOR REASONS:
1.5 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) IN ITS NOVEMBER 8-14 EDITION, THE INDEPENDENT "FINANCIAL GAZETTE" IN A SPECIAL INSERT PUBLISHED THE RESULTS OF A NATIONWIDE OPINION SURVEY IT COMMISSIONED TO DETERMINE SUPPORT FOR ZIMBABWE'S LEADING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. THE RAW UNWEIGHTED DATA SHOW THAT 33.5 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS PLAN TO VOTE FOR PRESIDENT MUGABE, 30 PERCENT INTEND TO VOTE FOR MDC PRESIDENT MORGAN TSVANGIRAI, WHILE, SIGNIFICANTLY, 31.3 PERCENT ARE STILL UNDECIDED; 5.2 PERCENT DO NOT PLAN TO VOTE. THE UNWEIGHTED DATA ARE BIASED IN FAVOR OF MUGABE BECAUSE A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY OUT OF FEAR OF RULING PARTY REPRISALS, ACCORDING TO THE "GAZETTE" ARTICLES. WHEN THE DATA IS WEIGHTED TO REMOVE THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO ARE UNDECIDED AND WHO DO NOT INTEND TO VOTE, THEY SHOW THAT 52.9 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE WOULD VOTE FOR TSVANGIRAI AND 47.1 PERCENT WOULD VOTE FOR MUGABE.

"SMALL VICTORY" FOR MDC

¶2. (U) THE "GAZETTE" POLL SHOWS THAT AFTER WEIGHING THE RESULTS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE MDC SUPPORTERS WHO REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE, THE MDC'S SUPPORT HAS GROWN IN ALL PROVINCES SINCE THE 2000 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, EXCEPT IN BULAWAYO, WHERE ZANU-PF PICKED UP SOME SUPPORT. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE ZANU-PF STRONGHOLD OF MASHONALAND CENTRAL, 28.8 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE PLANS TO VOTE FOR TSVANGIRAI, UP FROM THE 20 PERCENT OF THE VOTES THE

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MDC RECEIVED IN 2000, ACCORDING TO THE SURVEY.
IMPORTANTLY, HOWEVER, SUPPORT FOR MUGABE REMAINS ABOVE 50 PERCENT IN ALL THREE MASHONALAND PROVINCES. IN THE KEY BATTLEGROUND PROVINCE OF MASVINGO, MUGABE RETAINS THE UPPERHAND WITH 56.6 PERCENT OF VOTERS BACKING HIM COMPARED TO 43.4 PERCENT FOR TSVANGIRAI. SUPPORT FOR THE MDC HAS GROWN SLIGHTLY IN HARARE AND THE MATABELELAND PROVINCES. IN BULAWAYO, THE "GAZETTE" EXPLAINED THAT ZANU-PF'S INCREASE WAS DUE TO THE EXCLUSION OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES FROM THE SURVEY. BULAWAYO HAD A LARGE NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES IN 2000, AND MOST OF THEIR SUPPORTERS DECIDED TO THROW THEIR WEIGHT BEHIND ZANU-PF RATHER THAN THE MDC.

¶3. (C) ON NOVEMBER 8, POLOFF SPOKE TO PROFESSOR MASIPULA SITHOLE, A UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE LECTURER, COLUMNIST, AND DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC OPINION. SITHOLE CHARACTERIZED THE "GAZETTE" SURVEY AS "A SMALL VICTORY FOR THE MDC." THE RESULTS OF THE 2000 REFERENDUM AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WERE NARROW -- AND THE 2002 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WILL BE AS WELL -- SO ANY GAIN IN SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE MDC'S CHANCES, SITHOLE OPINED. HE STATED THAT THE FIVE BY-ELECTIONS OF

THE LAST YEAR BROKE NO NEW GROUND FOR EITHER PARTY. A CRITICAL FACTOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WILL BE VOTER TURNOUT. IT HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN LOW (45-50 PERCENT) IN PRESIDENTIAL POLLS, BUT IS LIKELY TO BE MUCH HIGHER THIS TIME AROUND, A FACTOR THAT FAVORS THE MDC, HE STATED. HIS INSTITUTE IS CURRENTLY TABULATING THE RESULTS OF ITS OWN SURVEY (1800 RESPONDENTS), WHICH FOCUSED ON VOTER APATHY AND VOTER TURNOUT. THE RESULTS CONFIDENTIAL

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SHOULD BE RELEASED IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS, HE SAID. THE RESPECTED HELEN SUZMAN FOUNDATION, WHICH CONDUCTED THREE IMPORTANT SURVEYS IN ZIMBABWE LAST YEAR, IS ALSO DUE TO RELEASE ANOTHER ONE BY THE END OF THE MONTH, SITHOLE NOTED.

POLL METHODOLOGY

14. (C) THE "GAZETTE" SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT BY THE INDEPENDENT MARKETING RESEARCH ORGANIZATION TARGET RESEARCH -- BASED IN SOUTH AFRICA -- BETWEEN AUGUST 17 AND SEPTEMBER 28. SITHOLE REMARKED THAT HE DOES NOT KNOW TARGET RESEARCH WELL, BUT HE HAS HEARD THEY HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. ITS RESEARCHERS POLLED 3,013 PEOPLE NATIONWIDE -- THE LARGEST SURVEY OF ITS KIND TO DATE -- AND THE RESULTS HAD A 2.7 PERCENT MARGIN OF ERROR. THE RESULTS WERE WEIGHTED AND TABULATED ACCORDING TO MANY FACTORS, INCLUDING GENDER, ETHNICITY, AGE GROUP, EDUCATION, AND URBAN/RURAL LOCATION.

COMMENT: THE RACE WILL BE CLOSE

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15. (C) BEFORE PUTTING TOO MUCH STOCK IN THIS POLL, ONE MUST CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING CAVEATS. WE ARE UNABLE TO PROVIDE MORE THAN A LAYMAN'S ASSESSMENT OF EITHER THE METHODOLOGY OR THE BONA FIDES OF TARGET RESEARCH. THE QUESTIONS USED BY THE POLLSTERS, WHICH IN THEMSELVES CAN SKEW THE RESULTS, WERE NOT MADE AVAILABLE IN THE PUBLISHED RESULTS. IN ADDITION, THE "GAZETTE" CLAIMS THAT IN 1999 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY NAMED TARGET RESEARCH ONE OF SIX "OUTSTANDING RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA," A CLAIM THAT IS APPARENTLY UNFOUNDED. MOREOVER, THE "GAZETTE" APPEARS TO ASSUME THAT THE LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO DID NOT RESPOND TO THE SURVEY WOULD SUPPORT THE MDC. THE SURVEY DID NOT MAKE CLEAR HOW THE POLLSTERS DETERMINED WHO IS AND WHO IS NOT AN MDC SUPPORTER AMONG THE NONRESPONDENTS.

16. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: ALTHOUGH SURVEY STATISTICS CAN BE MANIPULATED TO SHOW ALMOST ANYTHING, THE "GAZETTE" POLL DOES SHOW, NO MATTER HOW THE NUMBERS ARE SLICED, THAT SUPPORT FOR THE TWO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES APPEARS TO BE NEARLY EVENLY DIVIDED. BOTH PARTIES

APPEAR TO BE HOLDING ONTO THEIR KEY REGIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS FOR SUPPORT. MORE THAN A YEAR OF ECONOMIC DECLINE AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE HAS ERODED SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT MUGABE SOMEWHAT, BUT NOT TO THE EXTENT THAT MIGHT BE EXPECTED. THE SURVEY RESULTS COULD EVEN REPRESENT A TURNAROUND FOR ZANU-PF, WHICH A YEAR AGO WAS AT ITS LOWEST SUPPORT LEVELS SINCE INDEPENDENCE, IF ONE USES THE LAST HELEN SUZMAN FOUNDATION POLL AS A GUIDE.

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17. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: THE KEY FACTOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WILL BE THE LARGE NUMBER OF UNDECIDED VOTERS AND WHETHER THEY TURN OUT TO VOTE. IT IS UNKNOWN HOW MANY OF THESE MAY BE MDC SUPPORTERS AFRAID TO EXPREC THEIR TRUE OPINION. A SHOCKING 25 PERCENT OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS REVEALED THAT THEY CHANGED THEIR VOTING BEHAVIOR IN 2000 BECAUSE OF POLITICAL INTIMIDATION (14 PERCENT DID NOT VOTE AND 11 PERCENT VOTED FOR A DIFFERENT CANDIDATE). THE "UNDECIDEDS" MAY WELL DECIDE TO STAY HOME ON ELECTION DAY IF THEY FEEL UNSAFE, WHILE ONLY THE DIEHARD SUPPORTERS OF BOTH PARTIES CAST THEIR BALLOT. WITH ALL THE ADVANTAGES OF INCUMBENCY, IT WOULD THEN BE MUCH EASIER FOR ZANU-PF TO MANIPULATE A CLOSE ELECTION. NEW SURVEYS DUE OUT THIS MONTH SHOULD SHED MORE LIGHT ON THE LIKELY ELECTION OUTCOME. END COMMENT.

SULLIVAN

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